

THE FACE IN THE MIRROR IS NOT YOUR OWN

By Garett Kopczynski

2018 Golden Cobra Entry

2-10 players/ ~2+ hour (full day*)

The Facilitator is a participant!

Minimal prep required

This document can be read ahead of time and rehashed in play by Facilitator.

Setup and Materials

- A private location accessible by all participants
- Name tags at location
- Pens or pencils
- Notepad(s)

Timeline

- Larp starts for each participant when they wake up that day and look in the mirror for the first time.
- 2nd phase of larp starts at appointed time to gather (i.e. '5 PM at Room C of Student Hall)
- 10 minutes to introductions and review
- 30 minutes to organize participants
- 1+ hour to play out larp. Variable depending on the number of participants.
- 30 minutes to debrief

Safety

Visitor Prime Directive

- Door is always open
- Touch requires consent
- Ok check-in

About

This larp is about portraying an alien conscious called a 'visitor' that has taken over the body of someone called a 'host' and attempting to learn about their world and identity. You will be portraying yourself, but also observing yourself and the things that you do, the people you interact with, and the thoughts you have.

The setting is in our world, but you are a visitor who may or may not have hostile intentions as an 'advance scouting' group. You and other participants are part of this group and will be gathering together at an appointed place to discuss findings and a plan.

The physical space of the larp is wherever you are during the day up until the appointed meeting time, in which case the physical space will be a closed door in a room with the 'door is always open' mechanic in play.

Structure

This larp starts the moment that you wake up for the day and go into the bathroom and see yourself in the mirror. You should look at yourself for as long as you are comfortable doing so, assuming you are observing who you are from the eyes of someone else. From that point you and other participants are portraying alien observers, or visitors, who are trying to learn about themselves and the world around them. If it helps to write things down, then keep a notepad handy and write down observations to share with other participants later. When you arrive at the event site for 2nd phase with other participants, you will be discussing what you observed together and describing what your intent is as a group.

Context

Visitors from dimensions beyond our own arrive to inhabit the bodies of people and learn about them and their world. Their purpose is unknown, but it will be discovered. They have chosen to meet at a time, in a place, and implanted the suggestion weeks in advance as a cover and to avoid suspicion. Additionally, the visitors have agreed not to disturb the lives of the hosts until the meeting time, to learn best from them. The consciousnesses wish to learn the following through the eyes of their host:

- How is this society ordered? When you look around during your daily journey what do you observe about what makes this society function?
- Are there hierarchies? Are they exploitable?
- How do social relationships work, and is there a benefit to the way they are structured?
- How do organisms interact with one another, including those not in immediate proximity to the host?
- What kinds of habits are routinely engaged in by yourself and others? Are there repeatable rituals or behaviors, and is there value in them?
- What emotions or thoughts does the host have in abundance about objects or other people?
- How do others treat your host and what do you observe about this?

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Visitor Prime Directive

As part of the visitors' attempts to understand their environment and come to a determination about what to do all visitors have agreed not to disturb their hosts lives in any meaningful way. You will not direct your host to alter or impact your life, causing conflict or difficulty for yourself, or others. This includes the meeting in phase 2 with other visitors.

You should telegraph consent and ask if it is acceptable to make physical contact before doing so and respect the answer. If another visitor seems to be in distress, you are expected to make the 'ok' hand sign and if the other visitor is fine they should make the 'ok' hand sign back. If they give a thumbs down, you must ask if they can be escorted out of the room so that the hosts can take over and ensure their condition is safe.

The door is always open in the meeting room, meaning that no visitor can use their host to obstruct it, and if for any reason a visitor or their host need to exit they can. The prime directive allows the visitors to safely, and discreetly, navigate the world and come to a decision without interference of their study.

Introductions

Upon arriving at the meeting location, the Facilitator visitor should provide writing implements, name tags, and notepads to any other visitors that require them. You should write your host name down, and below that your visitor name. This name can be a series of numbers, letters, or resonant sounds that carry meaning for the visitor such as 1NX or PL@TO or 7777. You can refer to the other visitors in any way that is convenient for you, as the host's ability to say these names is far from perfect. Each visitor is expected to introduce themselves in turn however they choose.

Visitor Review

The rest of the meeting time is dedicated to the visitors taking about 15 minutes each to discuss findings. You should describe your day in brief, and attempt to describe your host and the world they live in. You should only say as much as they feel comfortable doing so, keeping in mind the prime directive to cause no difficulty for your host (who knows what other hosts will remember after the visitors leave). Visitors should ask questions in turn for another 5 minutes at most before moving onto the next visitor. Once all visitors have spoken the next phase begins.

What shall be done

The visitors review any subjects of interest that have come up about the observations of the world they would like to discuss. You should break up into groups if necessary or partner up with those that had something interesting to say. The visitors should agree to give at least 20 minutes to this inquiry phase. When you have finished your inquiries, you should raise your hand visibly, and go to a corner of a room. This will encourage other visitors to be mindful of their conversations and finish. When all visitors are finished, you should decide in a one sentence statement what your purpose is for as a visitor. It can be something along the following lines, or anything creative the visitor comes up with:

- We were sent here to determine if this world needs to be saved and we will invade to do so.
- I was sent here to examine what hope is as a concept and I know more about it now.
- We were sent here to taste food and I have determined I really like sandwiches and dislike seafood.

Final Steps

Visitors should arrange themselves on a continuum, lining up in order of whether the visitors should invade or leave the world and its inhabitants alone, with those most wanting to invade on one side of the room (determined by the Facilitator) and those wanting to leave the world alone on the other. You can arrange yourself in any way you wish, even being between the two sides.

The Facilitator should then end the larp. All the visitors are now participants and a debrief should happen. The Facilitator should ask everyone to get take a break if needed, and then to get comfortable to debrief with one another if you wish. The Facilitator should ask the following, giving each participant some time to answer to the group:

- Why did your visitor choose what they did?
- Do you think that the visitor would have learned anything else from future visits?
- Do you agree with your visitor's determination?
- Do you think there is something your visitor missed?
- What did you learn about yourself and your world as your host?
- Is there anything you think can be applied from your brief experience with your visitor to your day to day life?
- Is there anything you learned about another visitor and their host that you would like to share?

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Designer Notes

This larp was written during my lunch break at work. It's based on a concept that I have had stuck in my head for a while, which is "how do we see ourselves in the world and can that change?" I described this larp, in brief, to Ken Pickering and Tyler Brown initially when we were considering larps to write for Reverie Studios, but the scope wasn't appropriate for the kinds of events we wanted to put on at that time. As a designer I am immensely shy and writing for the Golden Cobra is a big step for me, but this year I decided to give it a try.

The idea of examining yourself when you wake up as a being not yourself, a diegetic exploration of identity, is something that fascinates me. The world is one that is constantly in flux, and in some ways so too is our identity throughout life. A larp that gives us a small space to look at that dynamism and discuss it with others sharing a similar experience is what I set out to do. I did not skin this larp to be one of horror, existentialism, comedy, philosophy or anything else: rather I intended this to be a sandbox approach with some loose direction and a 'soft' outcome.

The larp additionally should scale, being more intimate and intense with a smaller group, or falling into clades of conversation as the number grows. The more the participants know each other, the more the examination of identity and observing the world can open doors. The less the group knows each other, perhaps con attendees meeting for the first time, the more the unexpected can delight. The opening ritual is universal however, and most people start their morning in a bathroom, with a mirror, so it is a powerful way to enter the world of this larp and to share an experience with others doing the same.